Irrigation water charges at ALBA

Beginning Jan 1, 2008, ALBA will charge farmers for the use of irrigation water and infrastructure in accordance to the volume of water pumped. Prices are as follows:

	During "peak" energy hours	All other times
One acre-foot delivered at drip irrigation pressure	**$150**	**$100**
One acre-foot delivered at sprinkler irrigation pressure	**$300**	**$200**
Minimum charge per hour to operate pump	**$6**	**$4**

What does my water bill pay for?

About half the charge goes directly to pay the electricity bill. The other half pays for infrastructure and its maintenance. This includes the well, pumps, electric panel, variable frequency drive unit, and all the buried mainline and risers throughout the farm.

What are "peak" energy hours?

ALBA has selected the PG&E pricing package that offers the cheapest electricity at all times except during the "peak" hours when demand on California's energy grid is at its highest. Peak rates occur **weekdays** from **12noon to 6pm** from **May 1 through Oct 31.** ALBA will change **50% extra** for water pumped during peak hours. All other times are "off peak" hours. This arrangement results in the lowest overall energy charge for RDC farmers.

What is an "acre-foot"

An acre-foot is the volume of water that will cover one acre to a depth of one foot (imagine a one acre swimming pool filled one foot deep). The main pump at the RDC can deliver one acre-foot in about 9 to 15 hours depending on the pressure (higher pressure requires more time to pump an acre-foot).

Why does water pumped at higher pressure cost more?

It takes more energy to pump water at the higher pressure that sprinklers require. When the pressure switch at the pump panel is set to "sprinkler", the higher ac-ft rate will be charged. ALBA encourages farmers to coordinate sprinkler irrigation together in the same turn whenever possible.

Why is there a minimum charge to use the pump?

The variable frequency drive automatically regulates pumping speed so that energy is not wasted when farmers irrigate small areas. Even so, a minimum amount of electricity is required to pull water from the well and pressurize the pipeline whenever the pump operates. The minimum charge covers this energy cost.

How does ALBA divide the costs between farmers who share an irrigation turn?

The total charge for an irrigation turn is based on the acre feet that farmers report from the flow meter. Every gallon of water pumped will be billed to farmers, divided proportionally according to the hours and acres that each farmer reports in the calendar. Therefore it is very important that farmers accurately report their hours and acres. If one farmer under-reports their water use, the extra cost gets passed on to other farmers in that turn.

How can I save money in my irrigation bill?

Pump with the pressure selector set to "drip" whenever possible. When irrigating small areas (less than about two acres drip or one acre sprinkler), try to share the turn with other farmers. Avoid irrigating during peak hours when possible. Also, minimize the volume pumped by good design and maintenance of drip and sprinkler systems, good pressure regulation, and by preventing leaks. Reduce total pumping hours by careful soil moisture monitoring and by conserving soil moisture with organic matter and soil cover. ALBA staff and farmers offer tools and advice for water conservation.